

Trade by Brissac 89

WHAT HAS BEEN AT ALL TIMES THE
INFLUENCE OF COMMERCE UPON
THE GENIUS AND MANNERS
OF THE PEOPLE?

A
DISCOURSE
WHICH OBTAINED THE
PREMIUM
IN THE
ACADEMY OF MARSEILLES,
IN THE YEAR M.DCC.LXXVII.
BY M. LIGUIER,
MERCHANT OF MARSEILLES.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH.

*Attonitus novitate mali, divesque miserque
Effugere optat opes, et quæ modo vivèrat odit.*

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Задачи

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• 111. А. СИЛЯНЯН, МИЛАНІЯ ВІД СЕМІНІ
ДЛЯ ГЛАВНОГО АДАМІЧІСЬКІ
УЧИЛИЩІ ВІД СЕМІНІ

THE TRANSLATOR'S
INTRODUCTION.

AT a time when the spirit of emigration has arisen in this country to the height of enthusiasm ; the European nations, still thirsting for the dangerous acquisition of territory, or the false glory of conquest, are plowing the vast bosom of the extensive ocean, in search of new regions ; when the disaffection between our parent country and the American colonies has beat the alarm, from the banks of the Ohio to the banks of the Ganges : I flatter myself this short but sensible

A differ-

dissertation, will not be unacceptable to the candid enquirer, and meet with the approbation of the disinterested and discerning philosopher. Though it militates with the common opinion, it breathes such a spirit of liberality and truth, and abounds in such pertinent and judicious remarks as cannot fail to secure to it the commendation of every impartial reader.

I am well aware, that I am addressing it to a commercial nation ; to a city of merchants, whose fame and excellence in arts, manufactures and commerce, have a long time maintained a very striking pre-eminence over every city in the world.

With

With those who are blinded by the film of prejudice, or riveted to opinion by the false glare of riches ; whose minds are seated in the midst of their wealth, and whose ideas all centre in the means of increasing it, I am persuaded it will find no advocates ; to such men as these, I would not be understood to address it ; their minds, like bowls in the hands of the unskilful, have taken a wrong bias, and will roll on in error to the end of their journey.

The advocates I wish for are the wise and virtuous, the true patriot, and the man of candid enquiry ; before whom the shades of prejudice will quickly vanish, at the light of reason and the radiance of truth.

Thirst for conquest was the ruin of Rome ; not so much by the slaughter of her citizens as by the introduction of the luxuries of the east. Eastern delicacies and eastern effeminacy soon crept into the heart of the senate. That virtue and moderation which had preserved unshaken the public liberty, through so many ages, and spread the terrors of the Roman arms to the remotest regions of the then known world, soon yielded to the luxuries of licentiousness, and the dissipations of foreign enjoyments. Excess rioted in every quarter, and debauchery was triumphant in the midst of the capitol ; in that capitol where the voice of Cato had been heard with respect ; and in that city, for the preservation

ervation of whose liberty the Gracchi bled ; and for the maintenance of whose virtue, a fond father * sacrificed his children, with his own trembling hand.

All ranks of people were corrupted ; and the ambitious opulent soon found an easy purchase in the avaricious, dissipated, and needy. The richest man, at pleasure, became the most powerful, or served as a ladder for the more crafty to rise by. The whole commonwealth was rent asunder by faction ; and Liberty, expiring in the bosom of Cato, yielded forth her life and her empire, with a groan to the successful tyranny of a daring usurper. Thus fell the Roman republic !

A 3

What

* The elder Brutus.

What was the state of the Roman people upon the establishment of the empire ?

Public virtue and public liberty were no more ; the people felt their chains, but could not univet them ; they had no power to oppose to the tyrant. They sighed for that liberty which their dissipation had lost, and were now taught, by woful experience, that the bond once broken they could never unite again ; but like the reeds which are bent by the blasts of the north wind, were obliged patiently to submit to the hand of oppression, which bowed them to the earth.

The

The court of Augustus rivalled in elegance the pomp of a sophi, whilst the body of the people was groaning in slavery. Augustus, though a tyrant, was a sound politician : he knew well the instability of the imperial authority, whilst the murmurs of the people were suffered to be heard ; he drowned them in dissipation and debauchery ; he diverted their attention by public spectacles ; he brought forward and improved the liberal arts by a bountiful encouragement ; he displayed a taste for literature, and rewarded men of genius with a generous hand. This at once displayed his liberality, and gained advocates to his interest. It opened a new channel to ambition and prosperity ; and

by dividing the attention of the people, rendered all opposition impracticable.

The whole æra of the empire exhibits a long series of oppression, misery and distress. At length, dissipation divided it : and the irruption of the barbarians finished the scene, at once oversetting the Roman grandeur and the imperial authority. Thus fell the greatest empire in the world.

But from more modern instances we may with great justice draw similar comparisons. Spain ruined herself by her commerce and her conquests ; her country was depopulated, agriculture neglected, and thorns and briars clogged up the public

blic roads in almost all parts of the kingdom. As soon as she became mistress of the western hemisphere, she lost all her influence in the power of Europe; and has long served as the carrier to other nations of those riches which have cost her so much blood to obtain.

To bring the matter quite home to ourselves: let us reflect, my countrymen, upon the extreme depravity of this licentious age; let us reflect upon the disgraceful poverty of our nobility; and the baneful extravagance that prevails among all ranks of people: let us seriously consider these dangerous evils, and then discover what springs they arise from.

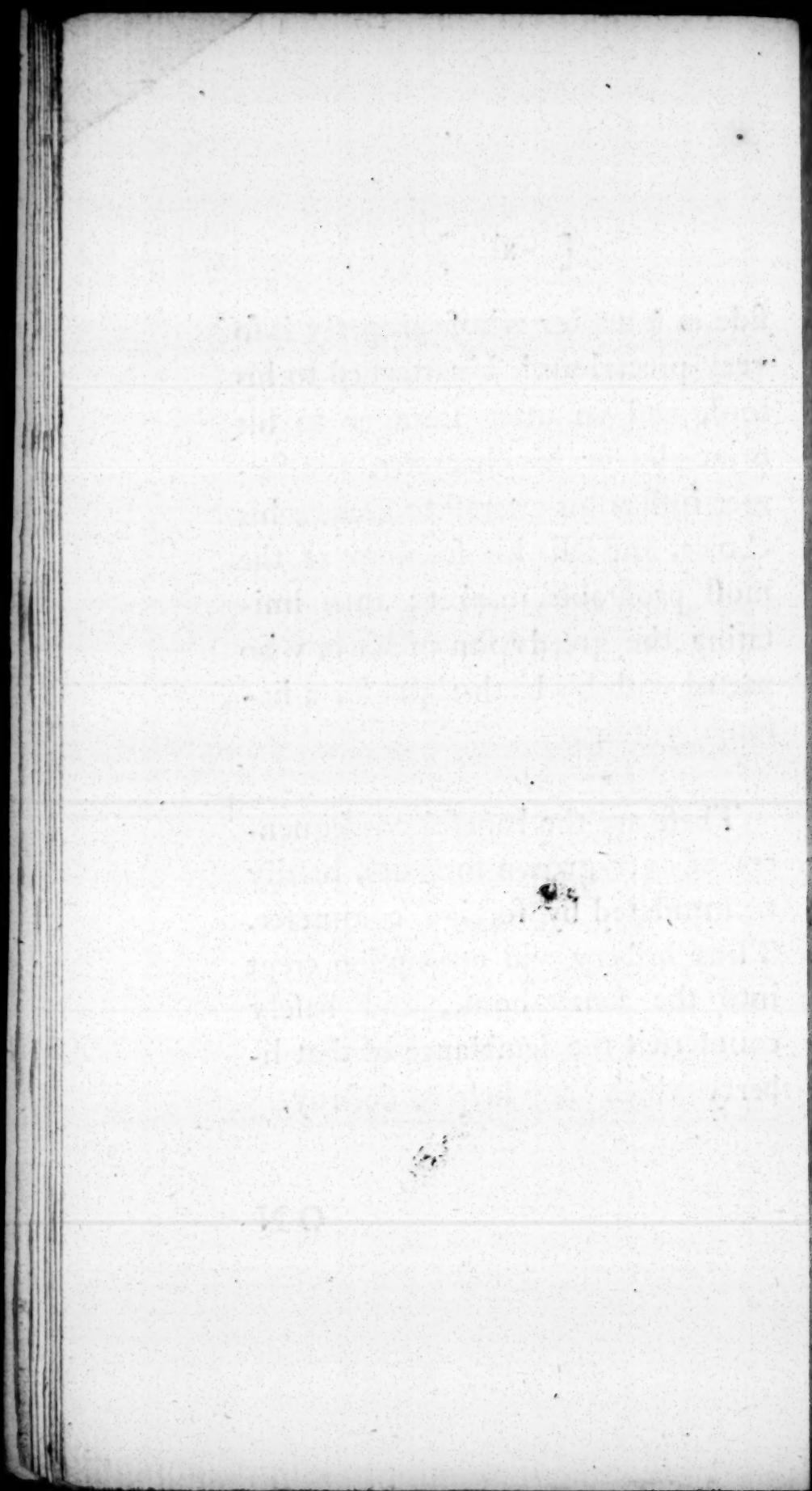
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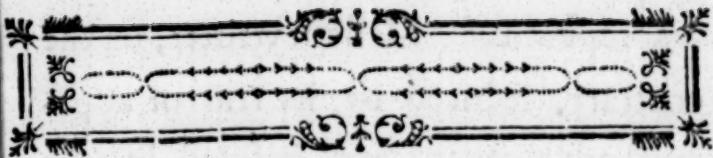
They arise from a profusion of wealth ; from the extent of our foreign commerce ; and the exotic luxuries of our eastern colonies. The vast fortunes amassed in the east, by the sweat of the brow, and in the burning regions of the torrid zone, have been spent here with a wanton extravagance, which has produced a general corruption of the manners of the people. Estates are purchased by these lucky adventurers at extravagant prices ; this has raised the value of landed property through the kingdom ; and the same estate has, in a few days been transferred to a new master by the chance of a die. Thus the allegiance between the lord and his tenant is effectually destroyed ; for what tenant will confide

fide in a master whose property is so very precarious? Unattached to his lord, and an utter stranger to his principles or his character, the farmer suffers his interest to govern his choice, and sells his freedom at the most profitable market; thus imitating the greedy son of Isaac, who parted with his birth-right for a basin of pottage.

These are the baneful consequences of over-grown fortunes, hastily accumulated by foreign commerce. Thus bribery and corruption crept into the senate-house, and basely counterfeit the semblance of that liberty which they help to destroy.

ON





THE INFLUENCE OF
C O M M E R C E.

THE ancients thought so little of commerce, that they have scarcely employed their pens about it. Those who do speak of it have disdained to consider a subject deeply, which their politics held in so little esteem. Xenophon doubts much if it is of any utility to a state.* Plato formally excludes it from

* Xenoph. Hiero. § 20.

2 O N C O M M E R C E.

his republic.* Modern writers, on the contrary, seduced by its real or apparent advantages, and dazzled by the splendor which nations acquire thereby, have immediately regarded it as the source of happiness to a polished people. We are anxious to encourage, enlarge and perfect it ; but nobody has taken pains to enquire into its influence upon the mind and manners. This great and important question was reserved for the academy of a commercial city, famous through twenty ages for its glory and existence, the rival of Carthage, and the ally of Rome ; and which, to our still greater astonishment, is almost the only city in the universe

* Plat. de Legib. lib. iv.

which

which has preserved its manners with its commerce ; and would to this day have remained untainted, if extensive commerce and purity of manners had not been wholly irreconcileable.

The part that I shall take, gentlemen, militates too strongly against the common opinion, for me to flatter myself with a general approbation : however, if commerce has been found, at all times, to have enervated the genius and depraved the manners ; if both in its nature and consequences it is incompatible with all the great virtues, tho' the truth be painful, why should I be afraid to assert it before those learned and discerning arbiters whose

4 O N C O M M E R C E.

wisdom has encouraged them to demand it ?

What though the ancient history of your country contradicts me ; though it be urged against me, that Marseilles knew at all times how to defend herself from its fatal effects : I advance in answer, that she owed this honourable exception to the smallness of her territory and the wisdom of her government. Her magistrates comprehending, at one glance, the whole of their jurisdiction, no quarter was ignorant of her laws. There are still in Europe some small commercial states, where public decency and public honesty are maintained by the rigour of the law alone, whilst

lust

lust and avarice reign triumphant among them upon the ruins of religion and manners. This was really the situation of Marseilles ; her trade and vicinity had corrupted the Gauls, * and yet she was reputed the wisest republic of her time.† Corruption was rankling in her heart, whilst the mere phantom of virtue supported her character.

We are told that a sword was suspended from the midst of the council-chamber : ‡ this threatening appearance proved at the same time the existence of wickedness and the vigilance of the laws.

* Cæsar de bello Gallico, lib. vi.

† Strabo, lib. iv.

‡ Valer. Maxim. lib. i. chap. 1.

PART I.

IT is, no doubt, very pleasing to see the nations that are distributed upon the face of this globe, surmount every physical and moral obstacle which appeared to separate them for ever ; open a communication with each other across the wide bosom of the ocean and the center of the earth ; assist each other in their several wants ; exchange their superfluous products ; familiarize their constitutions to a thousand different climates ; multiply their enjoyments ; create new pleasures ; and distribute their influence from pole to pole : nor is it

less wonderful to observe, that by this universal commotion, people rendered more dependent on each other, become more sociable ; their rude, barbarous manners are softened and refined, their genius enlarged and enlightened ; the arts and sciences either discovered or brought to perfection : all these extraordinary and astonishing operations are the effects of commerce.

What a flattering prospect would this be if moderation was our lot ! If without carrying things to their utmost extremity, we knew how to enjoy at the same time the fruits of nature and industry, without abusing them ! But such wisdom is not the portion of humanity ;

manity ; and commerce, which among perfect beings would be an exchange of benefits, is with us a fountain of evil. Like to those dangerous juices, which are potent remedies in the hands of discretion, but become fatal when administered in excess by the ignorant.

Mankind has no real occasion for commerce ; our preservation does not depend upon it ; all-bounteous Nature alone has furnished us with all the necessaries of life. The savages have no commerce, nor can have any, since they have not even an intercourse with each other. The nations that live by hunting, fishing, and the fruits of the forest ; the Nomades, who are still more numerous,

rous, and approach nearer to a state of society, know nothing of commerce. What traffick could there be among those people who are kept in a perpetual infancy by the severity of their climate or the sterility of their land ? Absorbed in care for their immediate preservation, and unpossessed of the means for raising themselves above the mere instinctive calls of Nature, they cannot properly be said to have either vice or virtue ; they bear no comparison with the members of civil society ; an invincible apathy obscures their minds and their manners.

It is not more necessary to husband-men.

Happily

Happily situated in a bountiful climate they find, in the fertility of the soil they cultivate, a certain support. Their mode of life, more fixed and sedentary, softens the coarse features of savage barbarity. The intervals of rest which necessarily take place between the several crops, give them time for reflection and improvement. The less difficulty they meet with in providing for their natural exigencies, the more leisure will of course accrue to them for the formation of the mind and manners.

We find too that mankind advanced in politeness in proportion to their labour and industry in agriculture. Agriculture is the true state of the social man,

man, and the only one which tends directly to the great design of Nature, the propagation of the human species.

It is an acknowledged truth, that the earth incessantly yields its produce in proportion to the number of its cultivators ; at once the mother and the nurse of mankind, agriculture sets no bounds to population or to plenty. It is therefore evident, that if men, content with the real necessaries, had not sought for the superfluities of life, they never would have thought of commerce ; for we cannot surely give that appellation to a pure and simple exchange of labour, a local compensation, and as it were a mutual reciprocation of the fruits of their industry.

But

But from a perfection in the works of agriculture, the arts and luxury arose. When it had multiplied both men and money ; when by an inevitable consequence of the laws of property, that equality which subsisted in the first state of simple society, was destroyed ; then the rich of course sought for the comforts and conveniences of life, whilst the poor applied themselves to the arts for support, and a mutual interchange took place between them ; the rich exchanging their commodiries for the laborious productions of the indigent artizan.* The variety of these productions ways increasing with the inequality of wealth,

* I understand by *luxury*, every thing that is not absolutely necessary to life. I call every man

wealth, to facilitate this traffic, a fixed standard, to establish the value of each respective commodity, was wanted. For this purpose, money was invented. To create a circulation of the different productions of each community, and enable every one to procure them, without being subject to the inconvenience of leaving the place of his residence, it was necessary that some men should travel the country with an assortment of them ; that they should buy and sell on their journeys ; and establish a correspondence wherever they went. These

man *rich*, who possesseth more than the physical necessities, and every man *poor*, who is in want of them. I know these words bear, relatively, another signification ; but, this, at present, I have nothing to do with.

men were denominated Merchants [peddlars] and this mode of merchandizing was the cradle of Commerce.

INTERIOR COMMERCE.

THIS traffic, distinguished by the title of Interior Commerce, would constitute the happiness of every nation, if they knew how to be contented with it. It is the only one that is not pernicious to mankind, because it gives no openings to the great springs of corruption. Every other kind of commerce is an enemy to agriculture, and undermines it; whereas this owes its existence thereto, and employs those hands only which agriculture can dispense with. A state unembarrassed with foreign connections

is of necessity agriculturous, since it has no other resource for its maintenance : if it has an interior commerce, it is when its rich, luxuriant fields afford a superfluity to nourish it. This commerce, therefore, is a clear proclamation of the public happiness ; it is in proportion to the superfluous stock, and of course considerable in well-cultivated and fertile regions, but of little profit in those countries where the soil is poor, or not properly improved. At any rate, however, it never leads to that excess of luxury which at once corrupts the rich by its enjoyment, and the indigent by temptations which they cannot gratify : nor can it ever burthen the state with artizans and manufacturers, at the

expence of the harvest ; nor harbour in towns that herd of idle people who are a sure presage of the decay of manners, and the downfall of a state.

It was a saying of Anacharsis,* that gold and silver were of no other use than to facilitate the art of arithmetic. He spoke as a Scythian. He would have said true in his own country ; but was mistaken at Athens. To commercial nations these metals are riches ; to people who look for no farther emolument, and are satisfied with themselves, the abundance of riches is of little importance ; for the price of food and of merchandize in these countries is always proportional, and the defect of these me-

tals,

* Plutarch.

tals, as they pass for no more than a token, is easily supplied by baser coinage, or the circulation of paper. In these states, too great an increase of money is, at all times, an evil. As the proportion between its abundance and the price of commodities cannot be settled immediately, the rich take advantage of it, to oppress the poor, without augmenting the price of their labour; and the ignorant day-labourer is astonished to find he can no longer support himself upon the same salary, without being able to discover the cause of it. Otherwise, interior commerce has no dangerous influence upon the multitude. It is easy to perceive what must be the state of that country whose sole depen-

dence is upon agriculture, and where money is held of little account ; which knows no other riches than the fruits of the earth, and the conveniences which result from their superfluity. As there will be a great number of labourers, few mechanicks, and still fewer idlers, the villages will be well peopled, and the towns moderate ; they will not quit the plough for the shuttle, because the arts of luxury will have little encouragement ; they will not labour for exportation, and their wants will be limited to their interior circle. In the wealth of the citizens there will undoubtedly be some disproportion ; but we shall not see that extreme inequality in the division of lands, which depopu-

lates whole villages, drives multitudes from their habitations, and accumulates immense territories in the hands of a small number of people. There, each order of mankind, by an happy necessity, is limited to the bounds of moderation. The rich landlords, accustomed to the innocent and tranquil pleasures of the country, living on their own estates, without avarice and without pomp, animate by their presence the zeal of the labourers ; their servants become accustomed to the works of the field, and fix their habitations among them : the estate is always subdivided into a number of little farms ; each individual delighted with his little inheritance, cultivates it with assiduity in the bosom of peace, and felicity, and all are desirous

to

to live and die beneath the same roof under which they were born. There, a simple traffic, supported by the indigenous productions of the fields, is not carried on by a class of men associated in certain great cities, but by a few individuals dispersed among the villages who are, for the most part, farmers and traders at the same time. This traffic, the influence of which spreads itself all over the nation, is sufficient to protect it from that *inertia* which would, in some measure, become burthensome, if it had no other exigencies than such as are purely physical ; but it excites not those unbridled desires, nor that extravagant ambition, to which so many victims are sacrificed. It tempers the roughness of rusticity, and, by that

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conformity it occasions in the taste, customs and habits of different provinces, destroys that jealousy which naturally subsists between them : it is the bond of union, by which a whole people is reduced, as it were, to one and the same family. The enjoyments which result therefrom, collecting and uniting a number of individuals by the same motives of inclination and interest, give birth to those societies which through the channel of agreeable amusement, are the source of instruction, and relax the mind with innocent recreations, where Nature indeed does not retain her primitive simplicity, but her image at least still continues to be adored.

If

If commerce forms the mind and softens the manners, without disturbing them ; if it seasons the zest of life with a pure and honest enjoyment while it is limited to the interior circle of a state, all is lost when foreign objects engross its attention. There is no check to the excesses which arise from this accumulation of it : as a quiet river, whose dimpled waters, gliding in meanders thro' the meadows, enam elthe green ; till swelled by the torrents of an impetuous tempest, it breaks down its banks, overflows all the plain, and lays every thing in devestation around it.

EXTERIOR COMMERCE.

ANTIQUITY, as the learned Huet observes,* did not exclude from the Golden Age the traffic of the earth ; or, in other words, the interior commerce of the country ; but the commerce of the ocean it referred to the Iron Age, as having no other incentive than avarice, and no other method of pursuing it than an unconquerable temerity. At this time, when navigation is brought to that pitch of perfection, and has raised some states to the pinnacle of opulence and grandeur, every person esteems it as the sovereign good ; and those states which possess only an interior traffick are

* Hist. du Com. des Anciens, chap. iv.

are not even reputed to have any at all. The word *Commerce* itself is no longer applied to any but foreign and maritime traffick ; and those who carry it on are denominated *merchants*, to distinguish them from the retail and interior tradesman.

I. COMMERCE OF OECONOMY.

THERE are two sorts of foreign commerce, the one of *œconomy*, the other of *luxury* : they must undergo a separate examination. The commerce of *œconomy* is forced, as is the cause which gives rise to it. The people who exercise it are those whom tyranny, violence, or some accident, has forced from their native country, to seek refuge in the

the islands, or along the sea coasts, upon a narrow or barren territory, unable to afford them the necessary subsistence. They have recourse, therefore, to fishing, or cruize along the coasts. They become insensibly the factors of nations ; they transport the commodities of the one to the other, and return home with the profits of their trade, which serve to pay abroad for the support of the state.

By degrees they establish manufactures ; and found colonies by force, by compact, or by stratagem. At length, grown rich, their commerce ceases to be that of œconomy, and branches out into the commerce of luxury. Such

was the origin and progress of Tyre, of Carthage, of Venice, and of Holland.

Though we grant that a commerce of œconomy was necessary for the propagation and support of those people, as they were not possessed of any natural means of subsistence, we are not thence to infer, that commerce originated from real necessity. Can we suppose that bogs, heaths, or barren rocks, were designed by nature for the nurseries of mankind ? Much less can we believe that without some extraordinary impulse they willingly transported themselves to those uninhabitable places, with a view to support themselves by the prodigious labours of a slow and uncertain industry. If they must draw their sustenance from

more

more favourable soils, it would be more reasonable for them to settle there ; they would there find their labours more gratefully rewarded ; since necessaries cannot be transported without an immense loss, either by shipwreck, avarice, loss of time, or change of climate. Beings who are tied by an invincible attachment to the place of their birth, and are naturally fond of repose, were not destined to seek afar off, and in the midst of a thousand dangers, for the conveniencies, much less for the necessities of life. Man was destined by nature to plough the earth, not the ocean, which should punish him for forsaking his calling.

The commerce of economy contributes little to the progress of genius ; one art, however, leads to others, for they are all connected, and industry continually exerted, lays the foundation for great discoveries : but the sciences are the fruits of ease and retirement ; they flourish not in the dominions of poverty and want. Besides, the genius of a mercantile people never branches out beyond its sphere ; applied incessantly to their profession, they travel not to instruct, but to enrich themselves : their companies, even those which embrace the universe with their trade, die with the object that created them, and give place to other speculations, founded upon new occurrences, and as transitory as the first.

Whilst

Whilst trade is confined to the pure views of œconomy, the manners are frugal, because the people are poor ; modest, because they are laborious ; upright because they want to establish a credit ; and courteous, because on civility their commerce depends.

But if indigence is their guardian from corruption, this situation is of no permanent duration. The thirst of gain is always increasing ; and the fate of these states is opulence or destruction. When once they are become rich, they soon grow most indolent and depraved : as the genius of commerce which founded them is the sole director of the movements in their political machine, it spreads through the nation a general

D 3 avarice,

avarice, which hinders it from attempting any great actions ; a greediness, which makes it venal, and insensible to every thing that does not tend to promote the sordid interest which governs it. "There," says Montesquieu,* "they make a traffic of all our actions, and all the virtues of morality. The most trifling necessities of humanity are supplied for money." Every thing concurs in blemishing the character of these people ; they will leave no stone unturned to cross the industry of others, lest they should rob their own of its profits ; they artfully sow jealousy among nations, that they may take advantage of their discord ; they establish a trade by intrigue, and support it by baseness ; and at last con-

* *Esprit des Loix*, liv. xx. chap. 2.

sole

sole themselves for the contempt they incur with the increase of their wealth. You see, then, how the spirit of commerce, when it leaps over the boundaries of a state, exiles all the virtues from its bosom ; honour, probity, courage, patriotism, and religion, are all sacrificed to that passion for gain, which is inseparable from commerce ; and to increase the opprobrium, the perversion of manners is not accompanied with that urbanity and benevolence which still continue to support society when honesty is fled. We see some nations preserve at least the appearance of virtue, whilst their hearts are corrupted ; but with these people no taste or delicacy remains, the disease is inseparable from the vice which caused it.

II. COMMERCE OF LUXURY.

THE commerce of luxury is neither founded upon real necessity, nor upon the first conveniences of life, but upon the pride, vanity, and caprice of mankind. This origin sufficiently announces what it proves to be in the sequel. It belongs only to fertile countries ; for what barter could be made by a poor state for foreign effects, if its own were scarce sufficient to support it ? But as soon as a people, enriched with the products of their bounteous soil, relax from virtue and moderation, and turn their restless inclinations towards the productions of other climates, they acquire fo-

reign connections, and incessantly increase them, till the whole universe administers to their luxuries. The wants of imagination continually increasing, having traversed the whole globe in search of enjoyments, the spirit of discovery engages their thoughts, and they lament at last that there is but one world to roam in.

This commerce, which arises from the first shoots of corruption, hastens its progress, and very soon brings it to that last fatal period, when the mind, not less depraved than the heart, becomes the apologist of vice. Thus was it reserved for the present age to esteem as necessary to the happiness, nay even to the very existence of the great, that relative luxury whose inevitable excess has,

has, at all times, been looked upon as a source of disorder. This system, so destructive of all virtue, owes its origin entirely to mercantile nations. Commerce, opulence, and luxury, being inseparable, it is but just that they should share together that approbation or censure which they deserve.

Luxury is the necessary consequence of inequality of wealth ; it grows with it, and runs to extremes when the few are pampered with a superfluous affluence, while the multitude is groaning under the burthen of misery. It is then that it is odious : indeed, when the state is arrived at that *acmé*, in what part of it are we to seek for virtue ? It is clear there would be no luxury if the distribution

tribution of property was equal. Would men be more happy or more wretched in that case ? I confess it is an idle and unprofitable question, since that equality is utterly impossible in the state of society. The question therefore is not how to destroy luxury, but how to restrain it ? How can we set bounds to its influence without stemming the torrent of riches ? and how can we set limits to opulence without stopping its source, which is commerce ? I have said above, that a state which is satisfied with its interior traffic, whose first wants are incessantly supplied from the industry of its own people, and the fertility of its soil, and which is ignorant of foreign commodities, that fountain of dissipation, parade and frivolity ; that state, I say, is alone

capa-

capable of cherishing a luxury, instrumental to the happiness of its people. There the disproportion in property will never run to extreme ! for too great possessions would be too burthensome to those who could purchase them, and luxury could never be carried to excess where every thing conspires to keep men within the bounds of moderation.

Agriculture and interior commerce are sufficient to give birth to the arts and sciences ; but it is the commerce of luxury which improves them, and brings them to perfection. The trade of nations with each other excites a general emulation, which sets all the springs of industry in motion, and the continual barter of the productions of each art is a spur

a spur to invention. As soon as a communication is opened between them, they compare the productions, and profit by their reciprocal knowledge and ingenuity. Their rivalry excites them to close observation, and stirs up their endeavours to excel, whilst mutual jealousy leads them to perfection. At length genius expanding on all sides, and enlarging the ideas, the light of knowledge is gradually extended by commerce through every polished nation on the face of the globe.

But if riches, luxury, the love of dissipation, if all the train—which accompanies an extensive commerce, produces an extreme refinement in the liberal and mechanical arts, and in science and literature,

rature, the inseparable companions of the arts : on the other hand, the same causes are unhappily productive of a depraved way of thinking, and a corruption of taste. The age of philosophy is the maturity of a people ; the age which follows it is the ruin of manners, and the corruption of genius.— The difficulty, or rather, as experience demonstrates, the impossibility of equaling the great master-pieces before us, leads the best talents astray. Launched out in the world, the rage for distinction makes men little scrupulous upon the choice of the means ; and the desire of pleasing, debases them to the level of a futile and disorderly age.

I shall, therefore, still venture to account it among the great advantages of interior commerce, that it confines the mind within proper limitations, and never carries the arts to that pitch of perfection from which they must infallibly decline, perhaps never to revive in those places where they flourished before.*

* "You pretend," says M. D'Alembert, in his answer to M. Rousseau, "that the cultivation of the arts and sciences is injurious to manners; I might object to you that, in a polished society, this cultivation is necessary, at least to a certain degree, and request you to limit its bounds; you have avoided the difficulty by cutting the knot, and believe there is no method of making us happy and perfect, but in reducing us to a level with the brute creation." The limits which M. D'Alembert here speaks of, would perhaps be found among a people who had no other than a national commerce, and no connection with foreign negotiations.

If we reflect a little upon the commerce of luxury, the imagination is terrified at the evils it incurs, and the mind bewildered in astonishment, wants abilities to enumerate them. The resort of strangers is the source of destruction ; on which account we find Plato forbids them ; and Lycurgus banishing gold and silver from Sparta, established that base iron coinage, which made all interior commerce difficult, and all foreign commerce impracticable. Plutarch tells us, that when the Epidamnians, found themselves upon the decline, which they attributed to their foreign commerce, they elected a magistrate to preside over their trade, and carry it on alone, in the name of the people. A modern author,*

more

* J. J. Rousseau.

more rigorous, would punish with death every stranger that entered a state, and every citizen that attempted to leave it. If in small states the resort of strangers ruins the manners, what will be the consequences in the greater, where it is still more difficult to prevent the inconveniencies, and watch over the whole body of citizens ? Whatever are the motives to intercourse among nations, an unhappy propensity leads them to mutual corruption ;—but if this motive is interest, it destroys all their virtues, because every thing is absorbed in itself. The mixture of people changes the qualities which are proper to each, obliterates the national character, introduces into the laws, customs, and usages, contradictions and absurdities; and

at last produces a contempt of religion, that scourge which precedes and follows the forgetfulness of every duty.

Foreign establishments, residence from home, and frequent voyages, relax all the ties of tenderness and affection : we forget our country, and are forgotten by it ; if we return, we find ourselves strangers by our own firesides ; the father and the children recollect each other with difficulty ; the family is assembled to part again suddenly ; the women, so useful, yet so dangerous to the manners, are left alone, sometimes a sacrifice to misery and want, and at all times to weakness and frivolity.

The

The great wealth which arises from trade, is only productive of evil.— Hume,* admirer as he is of commerce and luxury, confesses that it is of no real utility, but to pay foreign subsidies and allies ; but even that is the destruction of manners, and serves only to beget that spirit of conquest which devours its own entrails, which sounds the alarm, multiplies the military power, and keeps the universe in arms and defiance. On this account was established that balance of power which, far from maintaining that peace it was designed to establish, is become the pretext for perpetual wars, and makes them general. But if accumulated riches serve only to sow dissention among nations, what ra-

* *Essay upon Money.*

vages

vages do they cause, above all, in the bosom of a state ? In augmenting the fortunes of some, they increase the poverty of others ; and by breaking down all bounds to desires, they irritate the passions to excess ; they extinguish all patriotism in the soul, by the introduction of self-interest, which absorbs every other sentiment : at length, they obtain insensibly the rewards of virtue ; and then a confusion arises in the state ; opulence is equal to every thing : the accumulation of wealth is the only object. The more extensive the connection, the greater the interest. Men form more alliances for their business and their pleasures ; but the ties of true friendship and esteem, which require some sacrifices, and are always ready to make

make them, are dissolved. The friendships of the bottle, the table, and correspondence, are preserved ; but the heart has no concern in them. Every one maintains his interests with rigour, without pity, and without generosity. Hospitality, in particular, which extends its bounties with much humanity among all the poor nations, is for ever banished the regions of commerce. Everything, in these countries, is maintained with a rigorous exactation ; and happy are the people, if avarice does not flifie the dictates of justice.

Commerce not only communicates the various diseases of the different climates, but increases those which are proper to each, and generates new ones into the bargain.

bargain. Can we say that it also provides us with remedies? To set aside the injuries which these remedies receive from the adulterations or impositions of avarice,* who would venture to compare this feeble succour with the great loss of men by the sea-service, with the numbers of victims to unwholesome occupations, and with the weakness and injury which our fellow-creatures experience from their excesses and indulgence in those luxuries which commerce

* I shall content myself with citing, in this place, the best medicine in the class of *febrifuges*, the *quinquina*. The discovery of this specific has certainly been productive of more mischief than good to mankind, on account of its egregious adulteration. An hundred times more counterfeit than true Peruvian bark, is brought to market. Thus we have it at all prices wholesale, from twelve sous to twelve livres per pound.

supplies?

supplies ? This field, which is watered with the blood of mankind, produces nothing but deleterious effects.

If these are the inevitable consequences of commerce, what advantages can counterbalance the mischief ; and how great is the error which renders it so estimable in the modern system of politics ! This error, so great and so general, arises from a false supposition, that population might be doubly encouraged by agriculture and foreign commerce. But the effects of this commerce being riches and luxury, the pursuit of the one, and the enjoyment of the other, must, on the contrary, diminish population and agriculture, at the same time. It is an unwholsome, but an established truth,

truth, that no state can flourish a long time with the double interests of agriculture and trade. These two things are quite incompatible. The one enjoins moderation to our views and our manners ; whilst the other incessantly increases our wants, and excites the appetite, tho' nature is surfeited. When a nation, through commerce, makes rapid advances to wealth and dissipation ; when every one, even the dregs of the people, are taught to value superfluities as necessary to their welfare, it is vain to flatter ourselves with the prospect of restraining them within the bounds of rustic simplicity. As the price of provisions can never equal the price of those articles which luxury supplies, the circulation of money is principally confined

fined to the rich and to the capital cities, among the ingenious, who are continually accumulating; whilst the country is deserted and continues in poverty. The peasants abandon the fields where they gained a hard pittance, by the sweat of their brows, and flock to the cities, where they constitute that miserable multitude of mercenaries, footmen, porters, and beggars, who, to complete the corruption of society, get more in one day, than the useful and industrious labourer gains in a month. The landholders and farmers, jealous of each other's possessions, and sometimes molested by them, become disgusted with a frugal and laborious life. Their children, tempted by the prospect of riches, engage in commerce, or seek

their fortunes in foreign countries. The best lands are employed by degrees for the objects of commerce and luxury. All are deficient in hands to cultivate them, and the most fertile countries are at length reduced to the necessity of seeking their sustenance from less favourable soils, which the poison of luxury has not contributed to impoverish. How then shall we bring men back to the fields ? All possible encouragements could never retrieve a set of people habituated to a licentious and sedentary life, or enervated by sloth and effeminacy. The more magnificent the cities, the more numerous their inhabitants, the more incurable the evil ; and whilst the state is depopulating, and its foundations give way, they talk

of nothing in the metropolis but pleasure and dissipation ; trade and affluence, boasting of its population with a daring effrontery, in the midst of so many engines destructive of mankind.— For my part, when I see a fertile country extending its commerce to foreign markets, and counting money among the number of wants, the prospect reminds me of that weak monarch, cited by Plutarch, who died of hunger in the midst of the treasures which he drew from his mines.

It is generally allowed, that of all the sources of corruption among men, money and luxury are the chief; and since they originate from commerce, this consideration would alone be suf-

ficient to determine its influence upon the manners. But we have seen also that there are evils proper to itself: one especially we must rank among the most fatal of all; it favours seduction and debauchery; and, by increasing the public incontinence, carries dissolution to the farthest extremity. It is not the same with foreign commerce and the arts of luxury, as with agriculture and the necessary arts. The inhabitants of the country have no idle time upon their hands; the rural and mechanical labours keep them in a steady and regular employ; they know, at the beginning, almost the whole of their business to the end of the year. These simple people living at a small expence, and free from riot and licentiousness, have short intervals

intervals of leisure, which they fill up with rest and exercise, and some rustic amusements, from which no disorder arises. There is not that steadiness in commercial affairs : navigation and the manufactures of luxury are often at a stand. A thousand different causes occasion almost a total cessation of trade ; and we see, on a sudden, an immense multitude of workmen and day-labourers of all kinds, reduced to misery, which is felt more severely, because, accustomed as they were to the ease and comforts which their lucrative employments procured them, a frugal life is become insupportable.*

It

* And if they found it possible to content themselves with it, by what means could they obtain

It is then that——But let us draw a veil over the odious picture of the manners which must arise in the midst of an idle multitude, where some are glutted with superfluities, whilst others are in want of every necessary of life. If our delicacy could suffer the shock, there are too many commercial and manufacturing towns which would offer to our view the disgraceful spectacle.

this situation?—This is the subject for the prize of the arts, proposed by the academy of Lyons, for the year 1777. It requires to be pointed out, “the most simple and convenient means of employing in mechanics, or any other occupation, the silk-weavers and other workmen in those manufactories, upon a stagnation of trade; experience having demonstrated, that the most part of these people are but little suited for the country employments.” A question truly useful, but not easily answered.

P A R T

PART II.

WOEFUL experience attests in all ages, the evil which commerce has brought on mankind. Yes, gentlemen, look into the annals of the world, you will find the history of the intercourse of nations to be every where the history of their crimes and misfortunes. You will see each people maintain their virtue till they went beyond the limits which nature assigned to them ; and that error and depravity, devastation, diseases and death, marked, at all times, the progress of navigation and industry.

In

In going back to the highest antiquity, we see three very celebrated nations, whose virtues have astonished the world: I mean the Persians, the Egyptians, and the Chinese. All fond of agriculture, detached from foreigners by their religion and manners, and particularly distinguished by that detestation of ingratitude which characterizes sensible and beneficent minds.

The ancient Persians knew no other commerce than that of requital or courtesy. Their frugality and simplicity were so great, that so far from establishing a traffic abroad, they gave but little encouragement to any at home. An uniform education, at the charge of the state, consisted entirely in the lessons of

of justice, which was studied with as much care and precision as the sciences in our universities ; * and this singular people carried the practice of the virtues to a pitch of perfection which has since been looked upon as above the reach of human capacity. Under Cyrus, their manners still remained uncontaminated ; but the conquests of that monarch, with the riches and luxury which he displayed towards the end of his reign, were a source of corruption which, under his infamous successor, quickly spread itself all over the empire ; and those virtues which they still continued to preserve, as courage, and a contempt of falsehood and idleness, they owed to their religious injunctions,

* Xenoph. Cyropœd.

which

which attached them to agriculture, as the first of all duties, prohibited navigation of all kinds, and at this day continues to restrain them from maritime commerce.*

For thirteen hundred years before the reign of Sesostris, the Egyptians supported themselves and their government without any assistance from foreign commerce, and were the wisest and happiest nation upon earth. Upon a small but fertile territory, by extreme affluence and astonishing industry, they became a great people, whose wants were all bounded and supplied by themselves. An interior traffic poured forth the conveniences of life, through a thousand chan-

* Hyde, religion of the ancient Persians.

nels,

nels, over all parts of the state. Content with their own property, they disdained all foreign enjoyments, and prohibited strangers from entering their territories.* Just and peaceable in themselves, they employed all their power to defend them from foreign invasions. Their excellence in morality, in political œconomy, in agriculture, and all the useful and necessary arts, is well known; and whilst their invariable attachment to the customs, and, above all, to the profession of their ancestors, checked their progress in the sciences, it at least preserved them from their dangerous excesses.

We do not learn that this people gave any encouragement to foreign

com-

* Strab. lib. xvii. Diodor. lib. i.

60 O N C O M M E R C E.

commerce, either after they had been enriched and enervated by the spoils of the nations which Sesostris subdued, or after they were subjected to the power of Cambyses. Though they changed their masters, they still preserved, unaltered, through twelve long ages, the spirit of their first principles, institutions, and manners. The legislators of Greece, and her most celebrated men, went to Egypt for instruction in wisdom and virtue. But when Alexander had changed the constitution of the state, the Egyptians soon lost their importance by their attachment to navigation and commerce. Alexandria, which was designed for the barrier of Egypt, against the inroads of foreigners,* became the cen-

* Plin. lib. vi. cap. 10. Strab. iv. 18.

ter

tre of an immense traffic, and under Ptolemy Philadelphus, that patron of commerce, who studied little the happiness of his people, the luxury and licentiousness of Alexandria passed for a proverb ;* whilst the mixture of Greek and Asiatic manners compleated their overthrow, and made them a vile and despicable people.

The Chinese bear a striking resemblance to the ancient Egyptians. They had the same love of peace, the same esteem for agriculture, the same respect for their laws, the same aversion to strangers, the same industry, and the same veneration for their ancestors. This conformity of character was accompa-

* Vide Quintilian.

nied, for a long time, with the same effects. Both nations were blessed with an immense population : and justice, patriotism, and a zeal for good order, presided among them. Both subdued, by their manners, those nations by whose arms they were conquered. But China, more fortunate, was never victorious, and its barbarian conquerors were always polished by those whom they had subdued, and became conformable to the manners of the empire. This nation, whose origin is lost in the obscurity of time, has to this day preserved its laws, its customs, its opinions, its arts, and its splendor. There can be no better proof how much the exclusion of strangers contributes to the preservation of manners, and the duration of

of states. That flourishing empire always happy and prosperous in its interior traffic, has never established a maritime commerce.* Bigoted to their

* The Chinese sailors are still, at this day, so ignorant, that in spite of the very ancient use of the compass among them, they manage it very clumsily, and hardly dare sail with a fair wind, in a high sea. They exercised no maritime traffic with their neighbours, till after they had bought the permission from such of their governors as were covetous enough to sell it to them. It is only since Europe tran'ported its contagious greediness to China, that this cruising has become lawful ; but it is too inconsiderable to have any influence upon that vast empire, which is still wise enough to watch over the preservation of its manners. All her ports are shut to Europeans, except Canton ; and even there our ships are not suffered to moor within four leagues of the city, whilst our factors are confined to a corner of the suburbs. In spite of these precautions, this city is the most corrupted of all ; so great is the infection which foreign commerce spreads over every place where it meets with encouragement.

country, and proud of their antiquity, they hold other nations in too much contempt to have any settled intercourse among them. Sixty millions of inhabitants, and forty ages of happiness and prosperity, are the eulogium of the manners of this valuable people, and the fruits of an excellent agriculture, rendered necessary by the exclusion of foreign negociations. Land is so valuable in China, every thing is so wisely subordinate to the increase and support of mankind, that you see no inclosures, but few trees and meadows, not a corner uncultivated, or laid out in fancy, for mere pleasure or luxury; and what is quite singular, and much more admirable, each soil is fertilized according to its natural properties. From this afflu-

ence

ence of provision, and this great population, that vast interior traffic arises, which astonished travellers * have thought proper to compare with the whole circulation of commerce in Europe ; and, as if this region was destined to establish the principles I have laid down, the arts and sciences flourish there, but not in perfection ; and luxury makes advances, but not to excess. There is no pomp, but in the public edifices, there are no grand entertainments but at court, and among the great ; they are the sole cultivators of letters : the other classes of men occupied at the plowshare, the fishery or the workshop, lead a life of frugal simplicity, whilst their minds and their

* Du Hald, vol. ii. p. 170.

manners.

manners remain uncorrupted by the abuses of learning and luxury.* Let those who regard foreign commerce as a means of increasing population and agriculture, condescend to inform us why those nations whose traffic is limited to the circle of their own territories,

* These are the true causes of that immense population which cannot seriously be attributed either to the river-fish [*Esprit des Loix*, liv. xxiii. chap. 13.] or to the rice [*Rech. sur les Americ.* p. 3. § 1.] which they eat in China. The Chinese are indebted to Du Halde, and above all to Lord Anson, for the imputation of being great cheats ; they have formed their judgment of the people at large, from the tricks which a few miserable wretches pass upon the Europeans in such a city as Canton. But though it be granted, that craft is tolerated by the laws of China, it does not thence follow, that the manners are bad. " In Lace-demon," as Montesquieu admirably remarks, " robbery was countenanced ; in China, cheating meets with the same protection." *Spirit of Laws*, b. xix. chap. 20.

have always been the most numerous, and the best husbandmen ? Why have Persia, China, and India, those beautiful countries, where the clemency of the climate, and the fertility of the soil, appear to have rendered a laborious attention to agriculture unnecessary, neglected navigation and commerce for the works of the field, which they have always honoured and encouraged ? *

The

* Nobody is ignorant that the Emperor, and all the viceroys of China, set a yearly example of labour and seed-sowing. Most of the kings of India pay the same homage to agriculture. Hyde tells us, that the ancient kings of Persia, eat once a year with the labourers. And let us not ridicule these customs as vain and unprofitable ceremonies : two emperors of China have been raised from the plow ; one tilled the ground with his own hands. Every year a mandarin is made and chosen from the labourers who excel in their profession ;

The Arabians and Phœnicians were the first merchants and navigators : whilst these prosecuted their trade to the west, along the coasts of the Mediterranean, the Arabians became masters of the eastern commerce ; and their caravans transported the merchandize of Asia to Syria and Phœnicia, and as far as the Euxine sea. These people made themselves the more necessary, to the nations which they traded with, because they were without competitors. The Phœnicians, forced by their situation to the commerce of œconomy, were indefatigable, and soon became opulent. The Arabians possessed a country not

less ; and, at all times, those who distinguish themselves in agriculture are honoured and rewarded.

less

less deficient than Phœnicia in the necessaries of life, but abounding in spices and precious stones, the trade of which soon made them masters of those immense riches which tempted the ambition of Alexander,* and the avarice of Augustus.

All historians agree that the Arabians were weak, ignorant, and perverse : not content with the facility which commerce afforded them to the accumulation of wealth, they robbed and pillaged in every quarter, without distinction of friends or enemies.† They in-

* We know he entertained the idea of establishing the seat of his Empire at Saba.

† The same spirit of rapine has always existed among the Arabs ; and those of this day are not less cheats and robbers than their ancestors.

fested the Red Sea in such numbers, that the fleets of Ptolemy were employed in suppressing their shameful piracies; and when *Ælius Gallus* attacked them both by sea and land, he was more astonished than he ought to have been at the indolence of the people, abandoned as they were to robbery and voluptuousness.* If Mahomet afterwards made conquerors of these people that shook the whole universe, we must attribute this prodigy to the effects of fanaticism, which alone is capable of working such miracles. The use they made of the library at Alexandria, is a sufficient testimony of the spirit of the Arabs.†

The

* He lost only seven soldiers amongst them; but the climate fought on the side of Arabia.

† They condemned it to the flames, rather as useless

The Phœnicians made no progress in the sciences. They may say what they please of the title which their country has obtained as the mother of letters. They were under a necessity of cultivating the arts to a certain degree, without which they could not carry on their traffic ; but we have no testimonies which sufficiently announce that they ever had any other spirit than the spirit of commerce. Tyre, Sidon and Biblos were very rich cities, but had no pretensions to learning. They founded a great number of colonies, all of which, after the example of the metropolis, were merely commercial. Not one contributed to the advancement of ge-

useless lumber than as dangerous to the Alcoran. It served, we are told, to light the fires of the public baths for six months.

nius.

nius. Interest is so opposite to genius, that it straightens even that which is subservient to its views ; and we find the Phœnicians made no progress in the art of navigation, tho' their situation should have led them to perfect it.* Their lives were then frugal and modest, like the rest of the people who were led by necessity to the commerce of œconomy ; but envy, arrogance, dissipation, and every vice were their lot in prosperity.† Their superstitions and manners bore a strict analogy to their situation : when poor they sacrificed to the winds ; when

* In spite of their antiquity and long experience, they never dared to lose sight of the coasts, [Huet, *ch. xlvi.*] whilst the Romans, in a short time, launched out into the open sea. [Pliny, *b. vi. chap. 23.*]

† The description of Tyre, by Ezekiel, chap. 27 ; and Isaiah, chap. 23.

rich, they instituted the worship of Venus. What should we think of that people which first celebrated the debaucheries of this infamous goddess ?

The Greeks deified their first husbandmen, and every lucrative profession was held in contempt. Whilst they neglected commerce, they were virtuous ; but as soon as they grew rich, and launched out into trade, they suffered that corruption of genius which is marked by the perfection of the arts and the depravation of manners, both which they carried to the highest extremity. Athens and Corinth, the most famous for the extent of their commerce, were the most corrupted. The first resigned itself entirely to pleasures and literature,

H the

the other to incontinence and the arts. It was at Corinth, that temple of impurity was erected for the consecration of whoredom ;—from thence it spread itself over Greece, where it acquired a celebrity which increased the disorder, and an importance which compleated its ruin. From the time of Alexander, the Greeks began to decline. History informs us of their state from that time to the overthrow of the empire of Constantine. You see, gentlemen, their situation at this day, under the Ottoman power.

Two great republics disputed the world. The one was established on the foundations of commerce ; the other despised it : and whilst commercial Car-

thage

thage drew together the wealth and the vices of every country, Rome, without traffic, and peopled with labourers and patriots, was the residence and asylum of every virtue. Carthage, ever buried in her trade and her opulence, was averse to war, and trusted her battles to foreign auxiliaries. Rome, armed at all times, with constancy and poverty, flew to glory from the plowshare, and had no soldiers but her own citizens. Carthage was overthrown, and left nothing behind her but a proverb to perpetuate her disgrace.* Rome degenerated; but the memory of her virtues will remain upon record to latest posterity.

* *Punica fides.*

People of all ranks were merchants at Carthage, and every thing was venal of course. They not only trafficked with the honours of the state, but even put up the suffrages of the people to public sale ; for Polybius tells us,* that no trade was disgraceful at Carthage. This constant and general avarice made them a people confined in their knowledge,† and detestable in their manners. Insolent and cruel in prosperity, pitiful and savage in adversity ; servile in fear, and

* Book vi.

† They learnt only to read, write and cast accounts. Those who knew more were prodigies. They forbade, even at Carthage, the study of the languages and the sciences [*Justin. lib. ii. cap. 5.*] and for the seven hundred years which it lasted, if we except Hannibal, Mago, Hanno, and that Afdrubal of whom Cicero said that he had genius enough for a Carthaginian, it has not produced a single

and perfidious at all times.* We cannot be surprized if after the destruction of their city and commerce, the Carthaginians, incapable of subsisting by honest employments, joined with the Corinthians,

H 3 Corinthians,

single genius of any tolerable note : for we must not allow it the honour of Terence, who indeed was born there, but was educated in Rome, where he died a young man.

* It seems strange that commerce, whose peculiar property is to soften the manners, did not temper that brutal ferocity, for which the Carthaginians were always remarked. I believe we may assign two reasons for it : first, extreme avarice, which hardens the heart : secondly, the custom of sacrificing human victims. Almost all the nations of antiquity have sacrificed men ; but that superstition, more prevalent in Carthage, was accompanied with circumstances more atrocious than the sacrifice itself. The parents assisted with a dry eye at the ceremony ; with a savage barbarity they consoled and caressed their children

rinthians, and became pirates : a fate worthy of such a people.

When the Romans were enriched and corrupted by the spoil of the earth, they became more addicted to commerce ; but the irruption of the barbarians banished all traffic ; and the nations which

dren, which were afterwards burnt to the sound of the trumpet. The Carthaginians, who resembled in all things the Phœnicians, their founders, derived from them this horrible custom ; and, in spite of the prohibition of Darius, and their treaty with Gelo, retained it till the destruction of their city. The severity of the Carthaginians to the people of Spain, and their prohibition of agriculture under the penalty of death, to the inhabitants of Corsica and Sardinia, as well as the prohibition of trade in these islands, to all strangers, under the same penalty, prove how much the laws of Carthage were tinctured with the ferocity of their manners.

after-

afterwards settled in the empire, formed no commercial establishment. In Europe, for many ages, there was no other trade than that which was carried on in the fairs, by brokers, intermingled with quacks and mountebanks. These men were destitute of manners, and frequently incurred the rebuke of the church ; they robbed and cheated the people, and were again ransacked and pillaged in their turn, by the states which they passed through. At length, in Italy commerce revived ; and Venice and Genoa signalized their jealous avidity, by three hundred years of war and carnage. Tuscany was corrupted, and bought by the gold of the Medicis ; and Europe was partly indebted to this mercantile house, for the abuse and revival

vival of letters ; for softness and the ruin of manners ; for the schism of the west, and the furious dissentions which followed it.

Whilst the learned and voluptuous Italy, almost wholly monopolized trade and the arts, Genoa gave birth to a genius who opened the channels of commerce, and of the greatest evils which mankind has experienced. Despised in his own country, and discouraged by France, England and Portugal, he was at last patronized by Ferdinand : as if Heaven had intended, that an event pregnant with such numerous evils, should be the work of a prince whom posterity, that tribunal of kings, has devoted to the execration of ages.

Colum-

Columbus discovered America for the Spaniards, while the Portuguese opened a passage to the East Indies, by the cape of Good Hope. Then began that universal communication which mingled the people, confounded the productions of the several countries, and opened the springs of voluptuousness and corruption, to empty them upon the face of the world. The prodigious quantity of gold and silver, which they drew from America, and the riches of Asia, by exciting the ambition and avarice of men, caused a general fermentation, and a progress in luxury, which has been increasing continually, to this very time. The people made incredible efforts to extend commerce by force, and industry by commerce. They invaded each other,

and

and formed alliances. The powers always in arms, at length divided themselves into two great parties, which the vilest interest kindles into a flame, and the whole commerce of the universe now passing through the channel of Europe, the least spark of enmity that takes fire in its bosom, quickly spreads the conflagration to the extremities of the globe. The intercourse of nations has created in almost all of them, a conformity of industry, of wants, of passions, of vices. The same luxuries have caused the same disorders among civilized people: nor is there a greater distance between the manners of barbarism and those of depravity. The Russians were corrupted as soon as they were formed into a regular government; and the savage

vage Corsicans will adopt our manners, without having ever had any good ones.

This fatal revolution appeared to be announced by the horrid disorders which prevailed at the discovery of the two Indias. I am unwilling to attribute to commerce the massacre of those innumerable nations which disappeared on a sudden in America, upon the arrival of the Europeans ; nor the propagation of that terrible scourge which poisons every where the springs of life ; nor all the other evils which the hemispheres have exchanged with us. I do not even speak of the colonies, so many times reinforced, and always detained in those remote regions. But how shall I be silent upon the means which they fell upon

upon to cultivate America after having depopulated it ? A scheme so infamous, that it will be for ever, the lasting opprobrium of commerce.

When they saw the depopulation of the *new* produced the same consequences in the *old* world, avarice, ever rich in resources, thought of the negro trade. Barbarians, as we are ! we fix in cold blood, the price and slavery of our fellow-creature ; and yet have the assurance to talk of humanity and virtue.

We boast of the miracles which our industry effects for the utility and comforts of life ; though at the price of sixty thousand unfortunate wretches, whom we force every year from their

native country, and crammed together in the holds of our ships, like a parcel of hogs, where one half of them die broken-hearted, without reaching America, and the other meet with an untimely death, from the excess of their labours and the cruelty of their masters. If you ask what manners this abominable traffic has produced in the new world ? look round upon the uncivilized, mutilated slaves, that are sinking under the burthen of misery ; whilst their proud, voluptuous masters are plunged in every species of dissipation : in short, every thing odious, that arises from tyranny, caprice, debauchery, and the complication of every vice, is the offspring of this infamous trade : such a spectacle does that hemisphere present to us which was

acquired by crime, then colonized with the refuse of mankind,* and afterwards cultivated by the spirit of commerce.

If

* Every body knows what sort of people the first European settlers in the new world were.—England transported all her convicts there. That virtue must be extraordinary, indeed, which is capable of maintaining itself, amongst slaves and pickpockets. There are, however, in America, many people whose virtues do honour to humanity ; and it is that which renders their conduct to the negroes more irreconcileable. To justify it they add calumny to cruelty : they represent these unfortunate wretches as incapable of fidelity and attachment ; those who are so fortunate as to meet with humane masters, give proof of the contrary every day. “ I could,” says Father Nicolson, whom I cannot forbear quoting in this place, “ I could cite a thousand examples of it. How many negroes have saved the lives of their masters in passing the rivers ? Was that negroe woman at Port au Prince indifferent to the interest of her master, when the earthquake, in 1740, shook down

If the commerce of America destroys
harmony and population in the south of
Africa,

down their house ? She was found alone, in the ruins, with the child at her breast ; whilst every one else had fled from it, to save themselves, with the utmost precipitation ; she could not follow their example, without risking the life of the infant ; she chose rather to sacrifice her own, by covering it with her body bent like an arch. In this posture she received, with unparalleled fortitude, the ruins of the house upon her : the child was preserved, but she died a few days after the accident, a victim to the generosity of her heart. I myself, I confess it, owe my life to a slave, who on that same fatal day, forced me out of the house I was in, the very instant before it fell down. He now enjoys his liberty. I owe my life also to other negroes, who, in the course of my travels, have many times apprized me of dangers which I did not perceive. Had that young negro no attachment to his master, when seeing him embarked, by order of government, with a strict prohibition of his servants from following him, he got himself sewed up in a hammock to elude the vigilance of the guards ? If men were not soon for-

Africa, that of Europe nurses piracy and robbery in the west and in the north. Undoubtedly it is our maritime commerce which allures the states of Barbary from the honest labours of agriculture by the prospect of plunder which it affords them ; and it is the jealousy of the commercial nations which engages some of them to purchase

getful of benefits, they would be astonished to see such courage, such heroism, and such greatness of soul, in the children of bondage. Nor are they so stupid as is generally imagined ; they easily learn the trades that are taught them ; they are very good imitators ; and if they must receive their instructions from us, if they discover no genius for invention, we must attribute it to the consequences of slavery, which fetters the soul, and abases every idea." [*Essay upon the Natural History of St. Domingo.*] In short, since Pennsylvania gave freedom to her negroes, she begins to believe them not unworthy of being so.

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of these people a shameful peace, and furnish them, by their tributes, with the means of commencing hostilities with others. It is also the spirit of commerce which supports in Asia and Africa those vast settlements which the Europeans have founded by fraud and violence, cemented with rivers of blood, and preserve only by the aid of a barbarous policy, which is continually sowing and fomenting divisions among the natives.

You see, gentlemen, under what auspices our immense commerce is carried on over all the habitable regions of the globe ! It is by these means that Europe has arisen to a pitch of opulence and magnificence which has no equal in the annals of antiquity. But from this uni-

versal commerce what real advantage have we derived, if so many enjoyments, so far from increasing our welfare, have served only to enfeeble our bodies and diminish our numbers,* to make us more wicked and more unfortunate ?

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* The partizans of commerce and luxury do not allow that the world is now less populous than of old times : but no solid reasons have as yet been opposed to the 112th and 113th Persian letters, and the 17th, 18th and 19th chapters of the 23d book of the *Spirit of the Laws*. Their most specious argument is the decrease of the forests which cover the earth ; but if we compare our navigation, commerce, timber-work, and all the objects of our necessities, with those of the ancients, we shall perhaps be surprised how these woods could have afforded a sufficient supply for such immense navies, for our vast cooperages, for our carpenters and joiners, besides fuel for the immense number of manufactories and foundries, and our own private firesides. Considering the progress which is still

For want of knowing how to distinguish between interior and exterior commerce, we have always confounded their causes and effects. Hence we have been led to attribute to commerce in general advantages which entirely belong to interior traffic, without perceiving that the other is a source of excess and disorder, and not productive of any real uti-

making in commerce and luxury, who knows but there may be a want of wood, though there be no increase of population ? But observe, you will say, these neighbouring cities, which are increasing every day. Yes, indeed, I see the continual depopulation of the country, to enlarge and recruit the cities ; for in all great cities it is proved that the burials exceed the births. But, admitting Europe to be as populous as ever, admitting the whole history of the ancient population of Egypt, Asia Minor, Greece, Italy, Spain, and the north, to be false, would our philosophy still dare to reckon as nothing the total destruction of the natives of America, whose loss the actual population of America cannot make up for ?

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lity. It is not, in fact, foreign commerce and the manufactures of luxury, that can fertilize and people a country ; but when agriculture is flourishing, and population is numerous, they naturally give birth to every advantage ; and then an interior traffic gives life to the state, and makes freedom circulate through every vein of it. When a nation, by its own industry, and the gratefulness of its soil, is possessed of every real necessary of life, what can all the treasures which arise from the perfections of art, and the commerce of luxury add to its happiness ? As these fictitious riches increase, the division of them becomes proportionably unequal ; by degrees their possessors monopolize all the small farms about them, and a thousand circumstances

cumstances give occasion to a daily increase of the poor. Therefore, though we allow it to be true, that money is the marrow of riches, what man is so destitute of feeling as to contemplate with pleasure the prosperity of a few individuals, purchased with the tears of the miserable multitude?

At all times and in all countries the people live by the work of their hands, and have no more than a daily subsistence. Reduced, in all states of circumstances, to the most trifling pittance, what have they gained by commerce? or rather, what have they not lost by it? Instead of the wholesome labour and fresh air of the country, which strengthen the body, pent up in cities, they are occupied

occupied at a great number of sedentary professions, some of which are fatal to them, and the most part injurious to their constitutions. The city-labourers are not richer than those of the country ; for though their wages are higher, and their occupations more profitable, the high price of provisions, dissipation and their free mode of life, rob them of the advantages ; and if they fall sick, or, as I observed before, there is no demand for their commodities in the market, they are destitute of resource ; for those men who have once quitted the works of the field never return to them ; and thus the state is over-run with rogues and beggars.

In short, there would very seldom be any great crimes, and always some regularity of manners among the people, if they were limited to rural employments, a mixture of labourers and artisans, bounded in their desires, and strangers to idleness. The slaves to vanity and luxury would be few; whereas commerce has spread through all classes of citizens an insatiable avarice, and a taste for dissipation, and given rise to a multitude of professions, which harden the heart, and fill it with disgraceful passions.

The Spaniards and Portuguese are a great and conspicuous example to the world. Their fields covered with briars, the decay of their trade, and the

loss

loss of one half of their people have taught them, but too late, that prosperity dwells not in imaginary wealth. Buried in their gold, these people will be for ever a proof to mankind, that this metal is destructive of the useful employments, and that a state which is in want of the physical necessaries, is consumed by its own weakness or has but a precarious existence.

France had two ministers equally celebrated. Sully put agriculture in a flourishing state, encouraged the interior trade of the country, and was always an enemy to the commerce of luxury.*

Far

* The system which Sully never departed from, was to watch over the preservation of manners, in suppressing

Far from endeavouring to aggrandize the cities, he enjoined the nobility to live upon their estates, encouraged population in the boroughs and villages, and filled the state with shepherds and labourers. By these means the whole kingdom was restored to plenty and prosperity. In fifteen years time he spread happiness throughout all ranks of people, and restored our manners to purity, when Colbert began his administration.—Colbert.—Far be it from me to indulge a vain and solitary pleasure in censuring so illustrious a charac-

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suppressing luxury, and encouraging agriculture. In pursuance of this plan he encouraged the woollen manufactories and those trades which were immediately connected with the works of the field. He declared strongly against the silk manufactories, and all the arts of luxury, which he looked upon as the instruments of corruption and effeminity.

ter. He loved his country, and meant undoubtedly to serve it, but was egregiously mistaken in the means. The establishment of all kinds of manufactories, the distinguished preference which he gave them to agriculture, in the line of œconomy, and the vast protection and encouragement which he lavished upon the arts, navigation, and commerce, arose to such a pitch, that he forbade, in favour of the workmen, the exportation of corn, the only traffic which Sully approved of. As soon as wheat fell in its price, the people quitted their labour for traffic ; the fields were neglected, agriculture drooped, and a scarcity ensued. Colbert in vain endeavoured to promote population by bounties ; it necessarily declined with the means of sup-

port.* However commerce and industry gave the nation a lustre which passed for prosperity. In the arts and sciences

France

* France, in the days of Sully, counted five or six millions of inhabitants, and produced double the quantity of wheat to what it does now, in spite of all our clearances. These two truths are not sufficient : First, that Sully re-established agriculture, in encouraging the exportation of grain ; Secondly, that Colbert destroyed agriculture, by forbidding this exportation, and at last was obliged to have recourse to the system of Sully. The times are now greatly changed ; and who knows if, with our commerce, our luxury and our present manners, it is possible for us ever to have a superfluity of wheat ? If we cast our eyes upon the vast estates that are monopolized by the rich, and cultivated with fewer hands, and less care, than if they were subdivided into small farms, which would maintain a great number of families ; upon the lands that are over-run with trees, and forced, against the nature of their soil, to produce articles of commerce, or such as are useless, and unnecessary to life ; upon the immense quantities of natural and artificial meadow-land, pasture-

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land,

France rivalled the perfection of Greece, and surpassed her in some ; but luxury made

land, oat-fields for the support of horses, &c. employed in the post-roads, for the aid of commerce and luxury ; if we take into the account the parks, gardens, shrubberies, lawns, walks, roads and pleasure-houses, which surround the cities and large towns ; the direct roads from one place to another, through the whole extent of the kingdom, some of which are four times broader than those of the Romans ; the public roads for travellers, from the large towns, always much larger than those leading from small places, where the people live much at home ; the profusion of victuals at the inns and great entertainments, the waste consequent thereon, the hair-powder, and the profusion of all kinds which luxury occasions ; if we compute also the number of trades, as peruke-makers, packers, bankers, coopers, porters, messengers, carters, coopers, and other artizans of luxury, and that multitude of people of all conditions that so many occupations continually accumulate ; if we add to these the peasants that are drawn from the country to replace those that have met with an untimely death in the occupations of commerce, by the

made rapid strides in the state ; the money centered in the capital and commercial cities, and the manners degenerated. The avarice which was excited, gained additional vigour by the system of law. The minds of the people, from the prospect of gain, became attached to commercial pursuits ; wealth and luxury ac-

the sword, by fire, by shipwreck, by the scurvy, and in a thousand other ways : in short, if we reckon those innumerable swarms of porters, coachmen, and servants of both sexes, without forgetting the coffee-houses, places of public entertainment, shews, and women of an abandoned life, the necessariness of whom has, to the disgrace of our age, been so well demonstrated ; we shall then judge if it is possible for a state to export grain, after nourishing such swarms of men, who contribute nothing to the supplies of nature ; and we shall perhaps conclude, that if all nations had proportionally as much commerce and luxury as we, one bad year would destroy by famine one half of the human species.

celerated the corruption of manners ; and the excess of society, the rage for fine taste, and the disgust of solicitude gave rise to the corruption of genius.

There is a nation * in Europe which in the bosom of its fertile soil had brought agriculture and all the necessary arts to perfection. She was enabled, through the protection of the wisest laws, to reap the enjoyment of plenty and peace. Well enough provided by nature to secure her from the envy of foreign productions, sufficiently industrious to supply her own wants, and brave enough to be a stranger to fear, she had obtained the highest pinnacle of happiness that human society is capable of. This active and intelligent nation gave itself up to commerce, and by repeated efforts,

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* The English,

from project to project, conceived the mad scheme of ruling the seas, and monopolizing the trade of the world. Her situation seemed favourable to her ardent ambition. But overladen with riches and territory, fate, in this situation, stopped her career. She now offers to the eyes of the universe the picture of a rapid decline ; her colonies, like those of Athens in old times, attack the metropolis ; and perhaps her history will one day furnish a new proof of the destiny which commerce prepares for those people that are intoxicated by her.

There is another people,* remarkable for their bravery and rusticity, who still preserve, in the simplicity of their manners, the image of those virtues which characterize the earliest ages : and this

people

* The Swiss.

people, so far from engaging in maritime commerce, have scarce any with the neighbours around them. Encircled by mountains, on whose summits hoary winter eternally sits, they live in the enjoyment of a continual peace, and compel, by their labour, an ungrateful soil to nourish a population more numerous than that of the fertile and commercial countries.

Happy would it be for them, if their soldiers and their fellow-citizens, settled abroad, did not already import the refinements and vices of the nations they have been used to reside in !

If you want further proofs of the baneful influence of commerce upon the genius

genius and manners, compare the sea-ports and inland cities together, the trading towns with those which are inhabited by farmers and useful artizans. It is not in the mansion of the peaceful and œconomical citizen, nor under the rustic roof of the labourer, nor in the humble shop of the villager, that those infamous and criminal machinations are framed, which war against religion and the public security : nor is it in the boroughs or small towns that we find that multiplication of infamous stews, where impetuous youth is led foolishly to sacrifice, at one instant, his time, his manners and his constitution. Where, in short, if it is not in the mercantile towns, shall we find families forsaken by their masters, who lead beyond sea a life of reciprocal dissipation,

dissipation, and return without affection, and almost without recollection, to their wives and children ? It is in these circumstances, in a vain and brilliant society, that both sexes disgrace themselves, and yield to mutual seduction ; where the impudence of the one, and the coquetry of the other, beget that daring voluptuousness, which tears the very veil of modesty in pieces.

So many humiliating truths are undoubtedly sufficient to prove that riches and luxury, the necessary consequences of foreign commerce, have at all times produced a dissoluteness of manners.— “ What ! ” say you, “ must we burn all our ships ? Must we block up our ports ? Renounce all the wonders that our industry

dustry has produced, and return to our rural employments and simplicity of manners?" Stay, gentlemen!—In pointing out the evils which commerce occasions, I have not pretended to seek for the remedy. I confess, however, that the more we reflect upon this silly passion for commerce, which leads men to destroy themselves, to tempt the dangers of the ocean, and bury themselves in unsalutary climates, for sterile enjoyments, the more strongly we are induced to conclude, that men can never recover their losses, and taste the pure fountain of peace and serenity, till they have learnt, from experience, that there is no real happiness, but in the possession and peaceable cultivation of their lands, and that the only traffic which is

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of real utility, is that which nature has circumscribed in a state, by the number of its inhabitants, and the fruits of its soil. The investigation of this point would be worthy the labours of this enlightened age, and the execution might perhaps be hereafter effected, under the direction of a wise legislature. But if this idea is merely chimerical; if we can no longer support the privation of a great number of enjoyments and imaginary pleasures; if our tainted souls are no longer capable of tasting the sweetness of a quiet and uniform life, I will say to the nations, and above all to my own, " Since a foreign commerce is now become necessary, let us try at least to give it some limitations, and never forget that it has always occasioned the

ruin

ruin of the people who have carried it to excess.

I could wish my countrymen would cease to exclaim that commerce is too little respected, and that the nobility should interest themselves in it. It seems they are afraid of a failure of merchants, or having too much blood among them to shed for the good of their country. Who sees not that the spirit of commerce is incompatible with military genius? Interest has already corrupted our families, blended our conditions, extinguished the old spirit of honour, and overturned the manners of our ancestors. When Louis XIV. took the resolution to assemble the nobility of his realm, to conquer or be buried

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along with them in the ruins of his throne ; that intrepid militia would have crushed the whole power of Europe united. But they must know little of the spirit of commerce who think that a set of merchants would relinquish their all, in search of a grave.*

Beware

* To form a proper judgment of the spirit of commerce and its effects, we should cast an eye upon those people who are solely supported by it. See by what means the Dutch have established an exclusive trade with Japan. Nobody is ignorant that Louvois purchased of them that ammunition with which their country was conquered. "It is not at all surprizing," says Voltaire upon this subject, "that tradesmen should sell these stores before the declaration of war, when they sell them every day to the enemy in the midst of the hottest campaigns." The answer, which a merchant of this country made to Prince Maurice, who reprimanded him for this traffic is well known. "My Lord," said he, "if

Beware of confounding nobility and commerce ; let there always be between them

there was a prospect of carrying on by sea an advantageous commerce with Hell, I would risque the burning of my sails to establish it." [*Effai sur l'Hist. gen.*] Holland, rich, tolerant, industrious and free, seems calculated for the encouragement of the arts and sciences. However, though an adept in the science of commerce, the progress of genius owes nothing to her, it is one of those countries wherein letters are the least cultivated. Their scanty soil being moist, marshy, and fit only for pasturage, which requires no cultivation, her people are all sailors instead of husbandmen ; and that alone is an effectual bar to good manners. " What a vast difference do we see between the rusticity of the peasant and the drunkenness of the sea-faring people ; between the rude pastimes of the one, and the shameful debaucheries of the other !" An infinite number of public places of prostitution and drunkenness is open at all times at Amsterdam, with the countenance of the police, being deemed indispensably necessary for the protection of honest people from

them such a distinction as will preserve amongst the nobles the love of glory and disinterestedness, and will excite the French merchants to a continuance in the honourable exercises of their profession to merit that nobility to which they aspire, and which they so eagerly thirst after.

For you, ye happy inhabitants of the country, in whose dwellings both na-

the licentiousness of the mariners. But have we ever heard of the necessity for so infamous a diversion in the country, to divert the passions of the peasantry, or that to keep them from barbarity it was requisite to make them vicious ? They talk a great deal of the laborious life, the simplicity of dress, and the œconomy of some commercial republics ; but these are only virtues in as far as they are subservient to the exercise of others : without this consideration, the miser would be the most virtuous of all men ; for no one possesseth these qualities in so eminent a degree.

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ture and manners still find an asylum, quit not your peaceful mansions in search of that fortune which would cost you a thousand sighs of repentance before ye obtained it, and whose enjoyment would never recompense you for the obscure but tranquil days which ye must sacrifice to it. Learn to content yourselves with a life of ease and simplicity, so preferable to the bustling and tumultuous life of our cities, where the thirst for riches is turned into madness, and the love of pleasures is become a delirium and whence commerce has banished forever that moderation which is the source of all felicity, and the safe guard of yours.

Beatus

*Beatus ille qui procul negotiis
Ut prisca gens, mortalium
Paterna rura bobus exercet suis
Solutus omni fænore.*

HOR.

F I N I S.



